



SUCCESS STORY

Mosque Opens Computer Center

USAID works with local stakeholders to prevent conflict.



Photo by: CHF

The Imam at the central mosque in Istaravan at the new computer center.

With support from a USAID program, the central mosque in Istaravan, Tajikistan began offering computer classes to teach local youth marketable skills and expand their employment opportunities.

USAID's Alternatives to Conflict in Tajikistan (ACT) program, implemented by CHF International, reduces social conflict by creating opportunities for at-risk youth to channel their energies into productive endeavors. The program's community-driven approach to conflict mitigation rallies various community stakeholders to work together for economic development. Religious leaders play a key role in the USAID's program, serving on Advisory Councils, participating in discussion groups, and announcing and explaining program activities.

In Istaravan, the Imam of central mosque has been particularly active with ACT's Economic Opportunity Center. Concerned over the growing influence of an Islamic group that rejected modernity and sought to re-establish lifestyles of bygone eras, the Imam actively guides and promotes Economic Opportunity Center's activities to demonstrate the compatibility of religious and modern economic tools. The Imam and the Economic Opportunity Center collaborated to establish a computer center as part of the madrassa serving the Istaravan community.

The mosque purchased three computers for the center and also used the Economic Opportunity Center's partner company BioStar, to rent three computers through a "rent to own" arrangement wherein the title will be transferred to the mosque when the rent period is over. The rent agreement includes maintenance of the three rented computers as well as maintenance of the mosque's own computers free of charge.

The center is open Saturday through Thursday from 9am to 6pm, and to date, 72 youth have graduated from ACT program computer training classes at the computer center. Besides the computers themselves, the mosque contributed a heated room, tables and chairs, a board and other materials necessary for the computer classes. The facilities and trainings are advertised at the Friday sermons, which draw about 1,500 people, of which more than 60% are youth.

When the USAID's program is completed, the mosque will independently organize computer training classes at its facility to sustain this important community resource.